



FOUR SEASONS

# Falling for You Again

CATHERINE PALMER & GARY CHAPMAN



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*Falling for You Again*

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Designed by Jennifer Ghionzoli

Edited by Kathryn S. Olson

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FOR AUNT PEGGY AND UNCLE AL CUMMINS.

Thank you for loving me and my family so many years. I'll never forget the "three-ring circus" at Ngara Road, the laughter down the hall on prayer meeting nights in the house on Ol Donyo Sabuk Road, Uncle Al's booming voice preaching at Parklands, and Aunt Peggy's sweet Texas accent teaching me what being a young lady truly meant. From one member of the "girl Cummins" to my dear "boy Cummins" family, I love you.

C.P.

Ruth and I are happily incompatible.

BILLY GRAHAM, *when asked  
the secret of being married fifty-four years to the same person*

A good marriage is the union of two good forgivers.

RUTH BELL GRAHAM



## NOTE TO READERS

There's nothing like a good story! I'm excited to be working with Catherine Palmer on a fiction series based on the concepts in my book *The Four Seasons of Marriage*. You hold in your hands the third book in this series.

My experience, both in my own marriage and in counseling couples for more than thirty years, suggests that marriages are always moving from one season to another. Sometimes we find ourselves in winter—discouraged, detached, and dissatisfied; other times we experience springtime, with its openness, hope, and anticipation. On still other occasions we bask in the warmth of summer—comfortable, relaxed, enjoying life. And then comes fall with its uncertainty, negligence, and apprehension. The cycle repeats itself many times throughout the life of a marriage, just as the seasons repeat themselves in nature. These concepts are described in *The Four Seasons of Marriage*, along with seven proven strategies to help couples move away from the unsettledness of fall or the alienation and coldness of winter toward the hopefulness of spring or the warmth and closeness of summer.

Combining what I've learned in my counseling practice with Catherine's excellent writing skills has led to this series of four novels. In the lives of the characters you'll meet in these pages, you will see the choices I have observed people making over and over again through the years, the value of caring friends and neighbors, and the hope of marriages moving to a new and more pleasant season.

In *Falling for You Again* and the other stories in the Four Seasons fiction series, you will meet newlyweds, blended families, couples who are deep in the throes of empty-nest adjustment, and senior couples. Our hope is that you will see yourself or someone you know in these characters. If you are hurting, this book can give you hope—and some ideas for making things better. Be sure to check out the discussion questions at the end of the book for further ideas.

And whatever season you're in, I know you'll enjoy the people and the stories in Deepwater Cove.

*Gary D. Chapman, PhD*

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

So many people affect the writing and publication of a novel. For their beautiful example of a long marriage, I honor my parents, Harold and Betty Cummins. I also thank the many missionary families I grew up with in Kenya whose enduring marriages I have tried to emulate. For sharing both laughter and tears, my longtime friends are treasures I cherish. Janice, Mary, Roxie, Kristie, BB, Lucia, I love you. My prayer support team holds me up before God, and I can't thank you enough, Mary, Andrew, Nina, and Marilyn.

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Though I often leave them for last, first on my list of supporters, encouragers, and loved ones are my family. Tim, Geoffrey, and Andrei, I love you so much.

*Catherine Palmer*



## CHAPTER ONE

Fall always brings changes to Deepwater Cove,” Charlie Moore said as he sat at Patsy Pringle’s styling station in her Just As I Am beauty salon. “And I don’t mean the good kind.”

“Now you stop talking like that, honey,” Patsy chided, brushing the back of Charlie’s neck. “Especially on a Friday afternoon in my favorite month of the year. There’s nothing like a September weekend to lift a girl’s spirits—and I won’t have you trying to squash ’em flat.”

Patsy finished brushing the wisps of hair off Charlie’s neck. Then she turned him around and let him have a look in the mirror.

He checked to see that his sideburns were even; then he nodded.

“Good work, Patsy. You always fix me up right.”

She smiled and patted his shoulders. “I have a feeling this autumn is going to be one of our prettiest in years, Charlie. The leaves are starting to change colors already, and a cool breeze is blowing in off the lake. I don’t know why you’d think we’re in for a rough season.”

Charlie shook his head. “History, Patsy. Look at our history. A year ago, the last of the Hansen kids went off to college, and, well . . . you know things got pretty difficult for Steve and Brenda.”

“What else happened in the autumn, Charlie?” she asked. “I’ve owned this salon for umpteen years, and I can’t remember a single bad thing.”

“That’s you, Patsy. The eternal optimist.” He leaned back in the chair, adjusted his glasses, and began. “Last fall, we had the Hansen problem. The year before that, flu took two of our widows—one in September and the other in early November, as I recall. And don’t forget the year the pizza restaurant went belly-up, the main bank in Camdenton shut down its local branch, and the new tavern set up shop—all of them right as summer ended.”

“Well, I have to admit I’m no fan of Larry’s Lake Lounge. Why is it that bars never go out of business? That rankles me,” Patsy declared, whisking the cape from Charlie’s shoulders and helping him from the chair. If he didn’t know better, he’d think the young woman was trying to hurry him along.

Charlie started for the cash register. “I’m with you on that one, Patsy. Too many young guys waste the better part of their time and their money there. Never understood it myself.”

“And don’t forget the fall colors,” Patsy said. “I know folks enjoy going on tours to look at the leaves changing along the East Coast and up toward Canada, but land’s sakes, why don’t they open their eyes right here? The Ozarks has some of the prettiest fall colors God ever painted on a tree.”

“Sumac,” Charlie said as he tugged his wallet from his pocket. “Now there’s a red you won’t often see in nature.”

“See what I mean? Fall is a wonderful time of year.”

Charlie chuckled. “I reckon you’re right, Patsy. Plus, most of the out-of-towners are gone, and we don’t have to put up with all their fireworks, speedboats, and barhopping.”

“I love the excitement and fun the summer crowd brings, but I don’t mind too much when they leave. There’s a kind of peace that settles around us—even though we’ve still got plenty to do. Fall fes-



tivals, bake sales, church hayrides. And the high school homecoming parade, trick-or-treaters, Thanksgiving—”

“All right, all right,” Charlie sputtered, holding up a hand. “If I stay here any longer you’re going to talk the blues right out of me, Patsy Pringle. I was just working up a good head of melancholy and pessimism, but you’re fixin’ to ruin the whole thing.” He shrugged. “You’ve plumb worn me down with all your zip-a-dee-doo-dah. I won’t have any choice now but to be in a good mood, which means I’ll go home and infect Esther, who’ll get all chipper and talk my ear off.”

“Esther’s due here in about twenty minutes for her weekly set-and-style,” Patsy said. “In fact, I was surprised you didn’t come together.”

“I’m not going to sit through that ordeal again. I did it once and believe you me, once was enough. Nope, I think I’ll head home and start putting the vegetable garden to bed.”

Patsy sighed as she studied him. “Charlie, I just want you to know that every time I see you and Esther together, I feel like there’s hope for the world. You’re both so kind and helpful—and sweet as apple pie to each other. How long have you two been married?”

He scratched the back of his neck. “Well now, that takes some figuring. My seventieth birthday is just around the bend, and I was born in . . .” He paused, lifting his eyes to the ceiling as if the numbers were written up there in the wallpaper border. “And we got married in . . . hmmm . . .” He calculated some more. “Good gravy, we’ll be coming up on fifty years before we know it. Who would have thought?”

“Well, you’re a wonderful example for the rest of us,” Patsy said. “If I had ever gotten married, I would pray to have as happy a home as you and Esther.”

“You make it sound like things have always been perfect.” He reached across the counter and touched Patsy’s nose as if she were a child. “You know better than that, kiddo.”

She laughed. “I guess so, but I can’t imagine what could come between you.”

“Well now, we’ve had our ups and downs, Esther and me. More good times than bad, but we’ve worked hard to make it that way. You ever heard that opposites attract? That’s us. She’s a talker, and I’d rather read a book or watch TV. I’m up at the crack of dawn, and she’d sleep till eight or nine if she didn’t drag herself up to make my breakfast. We’re kind of like sunshine and rain, you know. You’ve gotta have both to keep things growing.”



“I’m late, I’m late!” Esther Moore hooked her purse strap over her arm as she hurried into the kitchen. “Cody, where did you put that stack of mail I set on the table by the door?”

“Mail?” Cody Goss turned from the sink, where he was scrubbing the gray and white speckled pot Esther used to fry crappie and catfish. “Is mail the same as letters? Because I read in my *Giant Book of Myths and Legends* that King Arthur and his knights wore *mail*. And also, the other day at the post office, I had to sign a paper to be a soldier if ever the president wants me to fight, and I checked the box that said *male*. So that’s three kinds of mail. There might be another *mail* that I don’t even know about, because I also found out that *tail*, which rhymes with *mail*, can mean—”

“I’m talking about letters,” Esther cried. “Not half an hour ago, I put a stack of envelopes on the little table in the living room, and now they’re gone.”

Gracious sakes. Esther dearly loved Cody Goss, but sometimes the young man could drive her right up the wall. Cody had appeared in Deepwater Cove this spring as a homeless, bedraggled stranger. Since then, he had been helping clean some of the neighborhood houses and shops—earning minimum wage and carefully building his savings account. After vacuuming, dusting, and tidying the Moores’ home, he often spent the night in their spare bedroom, and both Esther and Charlie enjoyed his company.

“The side table by the couch,” Esther clarified. “This afternoon, Charlie paid our bills before he went to get his hair cut. Then I wrote a birthday card for one of my grandkids and a get-well card for Opal Jones. I put stamps on every envelope and set them right there by the door. Where did you move those letters, Cody?”

He blinked at her, his blue eyes shining in the afternoon sunlight that slanted through the kitchen window. “You don’t have to put a stamp on Opal’s envelope,” he told her. “Since Opal lives right across the street and three houses down, I could take that card over there and give it to her.”

“Yes, but Charlie and I support our federal postal service, because—” Esther cut herself off with a little growl of frustration. “Cody Goss, where did you put my mail? If I don’t get those letters into the mailbox on time, Charlie will pitch a fit. That means I’ll have to knock on the back door of the post office and remind them that Charlie used to be a mail carrier, which might make me miss my appointment with . . . with . . .”

She shook her head. “Well, where am I going, Cody? You’ve got me so flustered I can’t even remember.”

“You’re driving over to Tranquility to get your weekly set-and-style at Patsy’s salon,” Cody said, his fingers dripping soapy water on the vinyl floor as he trudged past her. “And there’s your mail, right on the table by the couch. See?”

Esther would have dropped her teeth but they were still attached. There sat the stack of letters, exactly where she’d laid them earlier. But she would have sworn that when she looked for them a moment before, they were gone.

Now they were back. Just like that.

“Did you put them there?” she asked Cody.

“*You* put them there,” he replied. “The only letters I ever touch are the ones that come from my aunt in Kansas, when she writes to say she loves me and please eat my vegetables. She also mails me ten dollars every month, and I put that into my savings account, which

I hate to tell you is something you can't see at the bank even if you ask very nicely. Did you know that, Mrs. Moore? I asked to see my savings account one time, and the bank lady said sorry, but no. She told me an account is not a box with money in it. It's just pretend. An account is nothing but numbers inside a computer. You have to have faith that those numbers are the same as dollar bills, which is exactly like having faith that God is real even if you can't see Him."

Esther stared at Cody as she gripped the stack of letters in one hand and her purse in the other. What on earth was he rambling about? His aunt? Savings accounts? God?

"Cody, one of these days you're going to drive me to drink," Esther said as she opened the front door.

"I can't drive; remember, Mrs. Moore? I'm not yet smart enough to get my driving slicers."

"Driver's license!" she called over her shoulder. Then she began to mutter. "*Driver's license* not *driving slicers*. Oh, that poor boy is a dim bulb. I don't care what Charlie says about him being smart as a whip. He's never going to make it in this world without help, and I shouldn't even be leaving him alone in the house."

Wearing heels a little too high for the occasion, Esther tottered over to the carport. She set her purse and the mail on the roof of the sturdy Lincoln Town Car she'd been driving for decades. Fiddling with her car keys, she tried to find the one that unlocked the door. The car was too old to open electronically. That was okay with Esther, who had a hard time getting used to automatic door openers, television remote controls, cell phones, computers, and other modern-day necessities. A person could go crazy trying to understand the new technology.

Finally Esther got the car unlocked and slid behind the steering wheel. She was definitely going to be late, thanks to Cody moving the mail all over the house. It was one thing to have the boy help with the dusting and vacuuming. But if he kept putting things where they didn't belong, Esther would have to talk to Charlie about letting him

go. After all, she had been cleaning house for forty-eight years, and she could certainly keep it up a while longer.

Through the open front end of the carport, Esther could see the purple martin birdhouse Charlie had built and set up on a tall metal pole several years ago. It was listing a little to the left, and she would have to get him to straighten it. The trees that dotted their large backyard were starting to turn. It wouldn't be long before Charlie would be out mulching and putting everything into his compost bin.

As she turned the key in the ignition, Esther reflected with pride on her husband's fine garden. Every year they had the tastiest, freshest, plumpest vegetables in the neighborhood. Nothing pleased Esther more than to drop off a pint of ruby red strawberries as a get-well gift or leave a surprise basket of peppers and onions on someone's front porch. She pulled the car's transmission lever into reverse and pressed on the gas.

Just as the Lincoln began backing out of the carport, Esther saw her purse slide off the roof and land on the driveway. Oh, what now? She quickly put the car in neutral and pressed the brake.



Charlie had his mind on tomatoes as he drove around the curve that led to his clapboard house with its neatly manicured lawn. Feeling a little itchy for change, he had tried some different varieties this year. In the past, Esther had wanted only beefsteak and cherry tomatoes. Beefsteak for their sandwiches and cherries for their salads. But Charlie had put in three new plants as an experiment—pear-shaped red romas, a yellow variety, and even one that had a hint of purple to it. To his surprise, Esther thought the new tomatoes tasted delicious, and she had enjoyed showing them off at Deepwater Cove's Labor Day barbecue.

Having decided to be bold with peppers in the coming spring, Charlie was pondering the difference between sweet bells, anchos,

and jalapeños when he heard a loud bang from the direction of his carport.

Charlie stepped on his brake, gaping in disbelief as Esther's long bronze Lincoln flew through the air, sailing off the four-foot-high concrete wall that divided the driveway from the backyard and then slamming down a good ten feet onto the lawn. On its way, the car had taken out two of the wooden support posts holding up the carport's roof. Now the hood popped open and the horn began to blare. And the car kept going, careening across the grass as steam billowed from the engine and the hood bounced up and down like a jack-in-the-box lid. Somehow the Lincoln swerved around the purple martin house before grazing the trunk of an oak tree and mowing down a walnut sapling. Then it hurtled toward the thin strip of beach and the lake edge beyond, with only the shed blocking its way.

His heart frozen in his chest, Charlie put his own car in park and threw open the door. Was someone stealing the Lincoln? Had it rolled down the driveway on its own? Or could that dark shape in the driver's seat be his wife?

"Esther?" Charlie took off at a dead run. The Lincoln was now barreling toward the shed. Charlie had built it a few years earlier to store his riding lawn mower and tools. Just as the car reached the shed door, it veered to the right.

"Mrs. Moore! Mrs. Moore, stop!" Cody Goss suddenly burst from the house, leaped off the end of the carport, and raced past Charlie. "Mrs. Moore, the post office is the other direction!"

With the Lincoln's horn still blaring, Charlie could hear little else as he watched the car miss the side of the shed by inches. It pulled around in a tight curve, swayed toward the lake again, and then rolled to a sudden stop beside a lilac bush. Smoke billowed out from under the hood, and steaming water gushed onto the ground. The unremitting horn sounded louder than ever.

Cody reached the car five steps ahead of Charlie, but as the young man grabbed the handle, the door swung open.

Esther surged up from the driver's seat, shoved her way past Cody, and headed up the slope in her high heels. "Where's the mail?" she shouted. "I've got to get to the post office before it closes."

"Mrs. Moore, you had an accident!" Cody called after her as she marched toward Charlie, arms flapping in agitation.

"Esther, what on earth?" Charlie caught her by the shoulders and forced her to stop. "Are you all right, honey? What happened?"

"I can't find the mail," she snapped. "Cody keeps moving it, and I'm late for the post office. Those bills aren't going out today unless I—"

She looked up at her husband and seemed to see him for the first time. "Charlie?"

"Esther." He wrapped his arms around her and drew her close. "Oh, sweetheart, you scared me half to death."

"I don't know . . . I'm not sure what happened, Charlie."

"You drove the Lincoln out the wrong end of the carport. You've been in an accident, honey. Let's sit you down."

"Where's my purse?"

"Here, sit on my jacket."

"On the grass?"

"Yes, right here. I'll help you." He pulled off his lightweight jacket and spread it out for her. Then he eased her down onto the lawn. "Now catch your breath, Esther."

"What did Cody do to my car?" She glared in the direction of the shed. Cody was leaning into the driver's side of the Lincoln. A sudden silence sounded loud as he somehow managed to turn off the horn.

"Look at that boy," Esther grumbled. "He's gone and wrecked my car. I knew we never should have taken him on. You think you can trust someone, and then . . . where's the mail, Charlie? I've got to hurry to the post office. And my hair. Good heavens, I'm late for my set-and-style."

As she checked her watch, Charlie noticed a discoloration on her

wrist. “You’re hurt! Esther, honey, let me see your other arm. Oh, for pete’s sake, sweetheart, you’re all bruised up.”

“Esther? Charlie, what happened?”

He looked up to see their neighbor, Kim Finley, hurrying across the lawn with her twins in tow.

“Charlie, is Esther all right?”

“We heard the crash!” Lydia sang out.

“Your carport roof is caving in, Mr. Moore,” Luke added as they neared the couple seated on the grass. “You lost the two middle support posts.”

Behind them, Charlie noticed Brenda Hansen and Kim’s mother-in-law, Miranda Finley, moving toward the scene. Suddenly it seemed like half the neighborhood was descending on the Moores.

“I wish Derek was here,” Kim cried as she knelt in the grass at Esther’s feet. “He’s got all that first-aid training. Charlie, it looks like she might have hit her head. Her face is beginning to swell.”

“Whose face?” Esther asked. She was looking from one person to another. “What’s wrong? What happened?”

“You drove the wrong way out of the carport,” Cody told her. “You meant to go backward, but you went forward. We need to call 911 right now, because that’s what you do when someone has an accident. Even if they don’t look hurt too much, they could be hurt inside, and that’s why the doctor needs to check them. I saw it on TV when I was at my aunt’s house. They said to call the ambulance no matter what.”

“I’ve already called.” Brenda Hansen, crouched beside Esther, took her hand. “Do you remember getting into your car?”

“Well, that’s what I’ve been trying to tell everyone. I need to get to the post office. And Patsy’s expecting me for my set-and-style.”

Charlie had noticed a lump growing in his throat, and he tried to speak around it. “After you got into the car, honey, why did you put it in drive instead of reverse?”

Esther gazed at him, her blue eyes misty. “Did I do that?”



“Do you recall driving off the end of the carport?”

“I saw the birdhouse; that’s all.” She blinked a couple of times, and then she turned to where the car was still sending up clouds of steam. “I looked up, and the birdhouse was coming right at me, so I turned the car a little bit. And then there was a tree.”

“Two trees,” Cody said. “You did some fancy steering, Mrs. Moore. You missed the birdhouse, the trees, and even the shed.”

“Well, what do you know. . . .”

“We know you scared us halfway to deaf!” Cody exclaimed. “I still can hardly hear. But I got the horn to quit, and here are your keys. I switched off the engine all by myself.”

Charlie reached up and took the keys. The Lincoln wouldn’t be going anywhere soon, if ever again, he realized. The front end looked somewhat like an accordion, and the smell from the smashed radiator still hung in the cool late-afternoon air.

“I hear the ambulance,” Esther said. “Oh, goodness, I don’t think that’s necessary. But I guess we ought to go and thank them anyway for coming out this far.”

As Esther moved, Charlie saw her pretty face crumple in pain. “You sit right here with me, Esther,” he said, tucking her under his arm. “Just the two of us. We’ll sit here together, and everything will be fine.”

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

The principles and strategies illustrated in this novel are taken from *The Four Seasons of Marriage* by Gary Chapman. In this book, Dr. Chapman discusses marriage as a journey back and forth through different “seasons.”

- **Springtime** in marriage is a time of new beginnings, new patterns of life, new ways of listening, and new ways of loving.
- **Summer** couples share deep commitment, satisfaction, and security in each other’s love.
- **Fall** brings a sense of unwanted change, and nagging emptiness appears.
- **Winter** means difficulty. Marriage is harder in this season of cold silence and bitter winds.

1. In *Falling for You Again*, which season of the year is it in Deepwater Cove, Missouri? Which season of marriage do you think Esther and Charlie Moore are experiencing? What are the signs that let you know?
2. At the start of the book, Esther has a car accident. What changes does this event bring about in her life? How does the accident affect Charlie? What do their reactions tell you about their marriage?
3. Charlie and Esther have had a long marriage. What have they done to make their relationship successful? In what ways have they failed to keep the marriage strong?
4. In this story we learn that long ago, Esther formed a friendship with the Moores’ neighbor George Snyder. What was good about this relationship? What was unhealthy? Do you think husbands or wives should have close friends of the opposite sex? Why or why not?
5. Patsy and Pete are having a hard time with their relationship. What do you think each wants from the other? Why is it hard for Patsy to feel comfortable accepting her feelings for Pete? Why does Pete believe he is unworthy of Patsy?

## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Catherine Palmer lives in Missouri with her husband, Tim, and sons, Geoffrey and Andrei. She is a graduate of Southwest Baptist University and holds a master's degree in English from Baylor University. Her first book was published in 1988. Since then she has published over forty novels and won numerous awards for her writing, including the Christy Award—the highest honor in Christian fiction—in 2001 for *A Touch of Betrayal*. In 2004, she was given the Career Achievement Award for Inspirational Romance by *Romantic Times BOOKreviews* magazine. More than 2 million copies of Catherine's novels are currently in print.

Dr. Gary Chapman is the author of *The Four Seasons of Marriage*, the perennial best seller *The Five Love Languages* (over 4 million copies sold), and numerous other marriage and family books. He is a senior associate pastor, an internationally known speaker, and the host of *A Growing Marriage*, a syndicated radio program heard on more than 100 stations across North America. He and his wife, Karolyn, live in North Carolina.